Roger Federer is "pumped" to get into competitive action after a gap of more than a year at the Qatar ExxonMobil Open. And a small number of fans, with the Covid-19 restrictions dictating reduced capacity at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex, and the tennis world at large, will be just as excited to watch the 20-time Grand Slam champion back in action starting with the Round of 16 after the second seed received a bye in the first round.

"It's been a year since my last event," Federer said in a video posted on Twitter. "I can tell I'm very excited... it's been a long and hard road. I know I'm not at the finish line yet but it's good, I feel I'm in a good place, I've been practicing very well and I just feel really pumped up."

Federer, who last played in the Australian Open in January 2020, has won the ATP 250 tournament most number of times at three (2005, 2006 and 2011), and also played in the Qatar capital in 2002, albeit not his best memory since he had to withdraw from the semi-final due to a back injury.

"The first time I played here was in 2003, I played with kids yesterday, I don't know if you guys were born in 2003, but I just found it very cool and I just feel really pumped up," he said during a virtual Q&A with kids yesterday.

The 39-year-old, who underwent two right knee surgeries last year, will face in-form Frenchman Jeremy Chardy or recent Murray River Open champion Daniel Evans in his return match.

Chardy, who pushed Qatar ExxonMobil Open defending champion Andrey Rublev to three sets in Rotterdam on Friday, has already reached two semi-finals this year and Evans climbed to a career-high No. 26 in the rankings last month.

If he can overcome Chardy or Evans in his first match, he could face eighth seed Borna Coric in the quarter-finals. Top seed Dominic Thiem could also face a tough test in his first match of the tournament. The US Open champion will meet Australian Open semi-finalist Aslan Karatsev or Qatar's Mubarak Shannan Zayid. The 2018 semi-finalist is joined in the top quarter of the draw by fifth seed Roberto Bautista Agut, in-form Kazakhstani Alexander Bublik and Reilly Opelka.

Fourth seed Denis Shapovalov and sixth seed David Goffin will compete in the third quarter of the draw. Shapo- valov will face countryman Vasek Pospisil or qualifier in his opening match, while Goffin will begin his third appearance at the ATP 250 against Filip Krajinovic of Serbia.

Roger Federer arrives at Hamad International Airport.
Sublime Kvitova powers to second Qatar Open title

Czech fourth seed takes just over an hour for a straight sets 6-4, 6-1 victory over Spain's Muguruza in the final

By Yash Mudgal

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etra Kvitova’s dominance over Garbiñe Muguruza is so total that even the second set in their Qatar Total Open final yesterday, which the Spaniard won 6-4, was not enough to tip the scales in the Czech’s favor. But the final in Doha yesterday, which Kvitova claimed in 1 hour 9 minutes is withstood the Spaniard’s best efforts to keep the trophy.

“2018 was very tiring. I was totally exhausted. It was coming from St. Petersburg playing the Red Bull, playing Doha, and I remember the semi and final was just unbelievable tough. I played pretty long, suffering Caroline (Muguruza) in the third set and again, Garbine started to play better. I think it was different, because today the conditions were very tough compared. That year that as well was quite," said the 30-year-old.

The former world No. 1 was at her aggressive best against the Spaniard and did not allow her to play her game. Muguruza was also behind herself from the service game and overall won only 30 points in the first set. But this time she needed an hour less and reeled off the last six games of the match.

The 27-year-old Spaniard generated the first break points of the final in the third game, but Kvitova saved both to kick off the second set. Consistent double faults and the break back immediately to the second set, and overall the former World No. 1’s performance and her unforced errors mounted to 27. This was particularly evident on her forehand wing, usually the Czech’s strongest weapon, which repeatedly dropped deep and wide.

In contrast, Kvitova went from strength to strength after successfully navigating the danger zones. The two-time Wimbledon champion’s memory was more effective, chipping the ball through the middle and hardwood and Muguruza with depth and pace, as she pushed past the Spaniard with authority.

Both players were seeking to snap an uncharacteristic title drought. Kvitova has not won a tournament since Stuttgart 2019 and had lost three of her last four finals – including in Doha last year to Aryna Sabalenka. But yesterday’s victory maintains Kvitova’s overall dominance in little matches, with her career record in them now 32-10.

“Maybe I had more energy today. I think Petra played also very well today from the baseline. It hardly wasn’t due. I played, Muguruza said.

Muguruza said the game has no impact of their Round of 32 clash.

“No, I don’t think it affected me. I actually took the opportunity to recover a little bit after the tough match that I had. I felt that the conditions were very different but those levels were coming back up to speed. I think it was a very good week. Elegant that. I felt like everything was good, my game was good. I’m taking a lot of positives even though I’m not holding the trophy," she said.

Kvitova also improved her clean-sheet of never missing the semi-final due to walkover.

By Yash Mudgal

Stars arrive in Doha for Qatar ExxonMobil Open

Russian Andrey Rublev celebrates winning the Rotterdam Open semi-final against Greece’s Stefanos Tsitsipas (left pictured) yesterday. (AP Photo)

Rublev took down Tsitsipas to reach Rotterdam final

Andrey Rublev beat Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-1, 7-6 (4) yesterday to advance to the final in Rotterdam and extend his winning run on ATP 500 courts to 10 matches.

The 23-year-old Rublev, who beat the top-seeded Indian, opening set and put the second-seeded Greek away with a dominant tie-break to secure victory in 1 hour. Rublev, through a fourth straight ATP 500 final, will face Berrettini or Marton Fucsovics today as the Russian looks for his seventh career title. Tsitsipas, who conceded a 6-0 first set, has won four titles in consecutive weeks, dating back to the start of 2020. This was Tsitsipas’ 20th career title in 38 finals.

Qualifier Francisco Cerundolo keeps alive hopes of ‘Cerundolo sweep’

Francisco Cerundolo continued to take the family fight to the home country by reaching the record ATP Tour finals that the Argentine teenager has now 100 career, 8 of them at the European Tour. Three-time French Open champion and 1997 champion worth of the tournament, 2005 champion and 2006 champion. Third-seeded Albert Ramos-Vinolas will in the final of this season already following Wimbledon, and the final will be over the Rolex Paris Open, and had lost to 32-0

Djokovic confirms return to Tour at Miami Open

World No 3 Novak Djokovic said he believes the outcome of a wildcard last year to win a wildcard in the 2021 Australian Open, and also a wildcard in this year’s Australian Open. The 33-year-old Serb said he’s not ready yet, but has not yet decided whether he will play in the 2021 Australian Open.

Russet’s Donetsk Airport

Djokovic is returning to Doha for the Qatar ExxonMobil Open. The Tournament is returning to the Qatari capital for the first time since 2010, and the Serb is the defending champion following his victory last week. The tournament, which he did not stop

De Groot arrives in Doha for the Qatar ExxonMobil Open yesterday.

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QATAR TOTAL OPEN

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FOOTBALL

Muntari, Olunga give Duhail 2-0 win over Katariyat

**Xavi upbeat as Sadd look to wrap up 15th title game**

‘If we win three points in the next game, we are champions’

**CONMEBOL suspends March WC qualifiers due to pandemic**

**Premier League**

Xhaka shocker costs Arsenal, Saints halt slump

**By Sports Reporter**

Al-Duhail's Michael Olunga celebrates after scoring against Al Kharaitiyat yesterday.

**FOCUS**

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If we win three points in the next game, we are champions.
Glasgow Rangers fans condemned for celebrations after victory over St Mirren. Large groups of supporters have been identified by police as creating a public order offence at the game.

The Scottish government has condemned the celebrations by Rangers fans after their victory over St Mirren on Saturday. Large groups of supporters gathered outside the ground and a public order offence was reported.

The Scottish Football Association (SFA) and the Scottish Police Federation have both condemned the behaviour of fans.

A statement from the Scottish Football Association said: “We will continue to engage with Police Scotland and the SFA to make sure the safety of all fans is maintained.

“Police Scotland and the SFA have the responsibility to maintain the safety and security of all fans, and the SFA is strongly encouraging fans to show good behaviour.

“The SFA will continue to work with Police Scotland and other relevant bodies to ensure that football matches are safe and enjoyable for all fans.”

The Scottish Police Federation said: “We have been made aware of the reports of incidents outside Ibrox tonight and we are investigating.

“We will be working closely with the SFA and other relevant bodies to ensure that football matches are safe and enjoyable for all fans.”

Bundesliga

Bayern Munich's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski (l) celebrates with teammates after scoring during their 4-2 win over Borussia Dort- mund in Munich on Saturday.

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Bayern Munich's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski (l) celebrates with teammates after scoring during their 4-2 win over Borussia Dortmund in Munich on Saturday.
Ovtcharov and Ito emerge champs in WTT Contender

The main draw of the WTT Star Contender event will be held from tomorrow.

The women’s singles final was an all-Japanese affair, with Mima Ito scoring the title with a 11-5, 8-11, 11-4, 11-5 win over Hina Hayata. Mima Ito has been riding on a rich vein of form since the table tennis event at the Tokyo Olympic Games and the All England, who had beaten her counterpart on route to victory at the Qatar Table Tennis Championships yesterday.

Japanese women also won the doubles title, with two-time Olympic medalist Mima Ito and Hina Hayata scoring a 11-6 win over Hina Hayata and Carts All. The title features two titles of the new WTT event structure.

The Steiner System also features four players competing in a WTT Star Contender event moving on to a WTT Star Contender event, which will be held from tomorrow. The qualifying matches were held yesterday. A total of 16 players are taking part, representing 16 countries. The WTT Contender Series has been designed to provide the perfect setting for some of the world’s leading stars to be challenged by the best up-and-coming athletes at table tennis.

By Sports Reporter

Germany’s Dimitrij Ovtcharov and Japan’s Mima Ito clinched the men’s and women’s singles titles yesterday at the World Table Tennis (WTT) Star Contender tournament at the Losail Sports Arena yesterday.

World No. 12 Ovtcharov scored a comprehensive 11-5, 11-4, 11-4, 11-3 over seventh ranked Yun-Jun Lin of Chinese Taipei in the final. The winner of Chinese origin, who had beaten the top seed in the quarter-finals, where Ovtcharov was also warned over potential breach of Covid-19 protocol.

The German was cautioned for wiping the perspiration on the table and plunging into the ball. In the semi-finals, where Ovtcharov downed top seed Tomokazu Harimoto of Japan 4-2.

Meanwhile, 19-year-old Lin had something to smile about after he paired with Cheng Ching-Ching to win mixed doubles title yesterday. Their victory has been the Finnish-Shirted and second place of the Peking 2020 World Championships according to the match reviews. The underdogs in the quarter-finals, where Ovtcharov was tenacity and potential break of Covid-19 protocol.

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Conners takes one-shot lead in Orlando

I haven't really been in this position before, but I have a lot of confidence in my game and feeling really relaxed the last few days’

Corey Conners of Canada plays a shot at the Arnold Palmer Invitational Presented by MasterCard at the Bay Hill Club and Lodge in Orlando, Florida.

EUG "Bill" Fisher, "the man,” and his wife, Christiana, saved the life of their one-year old son, "Nigel," by performing CPR while waiting for emergency services to arrive. They later learned that the life-saving techniques they had practiced regularly had been the difference between life and death for their child.

Shields makes decisive win on decision win over Cicarelli

Felicia "Snoop" Shields faces a serious opponent in the form of Niamh "The Desert Breeze" Cicarelli in the quarter-finals of the World Cup of Boxing. Both are well known for their aggressive fighting style and are expected to put on a show for the crowd.

Loss

Indian Bellyachethletics coach found dead in room

The Indian head coach of the national athletics team, who was arrested for alleged sexual harassment earlier this year, has died of a heart attack in his room at a hotel in Dubai. The Indian Olympic Association confirmed the news and said they were shocked at the news. The coach had recently returned from a trip to Europe and had been scheduled to attend a meeting with the IOA later this month.

Bottomline

England rugby star Willis faces year out after ankle surgery

James Willis, the England rugby star, faces a year out of action after undergoing surgery for a serious injury suffered during a match against France. The injury is expected to sideline him for the remainder of the season and could rule him out of the Six Nations tournament.

Golf

Ernst and Kupcho lead PGA Championship

Ernst and Kupcho lead the PGA Championship after the first round. Ernst shot a 67 while Kupcho was one shot behind with a 68. Both are looking strong and are likely to be in contention for the championship.

Spotlight

Champions chase

The tournament is being held in Orlando, Florida, and features some of the world's best golfers including Tiger Woods and Rory McIlroy. The event is the third major of the year and will be played over four days from April 7-10.
FOURTH TEST

Kohli hails India comeback as rout seals England series

Spinners R Ashwin and Axar Patel took all 10 England wickets to set up huge victory, India took place in WTC final

Scorecard

Total runs scored 413 (overs 50.1)
Extras 175

e 15 3

OE = 8.5

INDIA

England

Extras

Run out: V Kohli (54)
Stumped: J Root (1)
Lbw: R Ashwin (10)

SERIES:

Gulf Times

7

SPOTTLIGHT

Spinners shine as SL go level with Windies

A

Australia’s Finch relishing fans return for T20 decision vs NZ

FOCUS

Australia’s Finch relishing fans return for T20 decision vs NZ
By Sports Reporter

Nasser al-Ghazi cruises to Big Tour victory at Hathab

Nasser al-Ghazi won the Big Tour Title during the 2021 season and prominence once of the Longines Global Champions Tour, supported by The Qatari Doha Bank. The Qatari horseman clinched his 12th victory in the Global Champions Tour with a competitive routine. He was presented with the trophy by Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, and the Secretary-General of the Qatar Equestrian Federation, HE Ali Al-Kaabi.

Al-Ghazi dominated the podium with a stylish routine, scoring 84.00% for his victory. He finished ahead of a host of strong competitors including Scott Brash, Lorenzo De Luca and Peder Fredricson. The Qatari rider's performance was a testament to his skill and dedication to the sport of equestrianism.

The Big Tour victory is the latest addition to Nasser al-Ghazi's impressive list of achievements, which already include the Gold Medal at the World Equestrian Games and multiple victories in the Global Champions Tour. His consistent performances and sheer talent have made him a force to be reckoned with in the world of equestrianism.

The Longines Global Champions Tour is one of the most prestigious events in the equestrian calendar, attracting the world's top riders and horses. The Qatari rider's victory is a testament to his exceptional riding skills and a shining example of the quality and passion that defines the sport of equestrianism.